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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Fearful Lesson Of U-2

Reviewed by

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THE U-2 AFFAIR. By David Wise and Thomas B. Ross. Photographs. Random House. 269 pages. \$4.95.

THERE WERE all those countless words about it in the press — and then, when the uproar subsided a little, a couple of Washington newspaper correspondents went digging still farther. All on their own and without any official help from any agency or anybody, they dug into the story of Francis Gary Powers and his high flying machine, the luckless U-2 which fell out of the sky over Russia and shook the world on May 1, 1960. They dug for a year.

David Wise of the New York Herald Tribune and Thomas B. Ross of the Chicago Sun-Times are good and knowledgeable reporters, experienced in the ways of life in Washington and elsewhere.

MUCH OF Wise's and Ross' new material relates to the birth of the U-2 in October, 1954, when the green light was given to a remarkable plan brought in six months before by Clarence L. (Kelly) Johnson, Lockheed's chief designer.

But it was on May 1, in Washington, that the real confusion began, with a phone call to Hugh S. Cumming, Jr., chief of intelligence and research of the State Department, that Powers and his U-2 were overdue at their terminal point in Norway. Mr. Herter was in Istanbul, Mr. Dulles in New York, Mr. Eisenhower at Camp David.

At a CIA meeting at which Mr. Cumming was the only State Department man present, a standing "cover" story — missing weather research plane — was touched up and sent to Istanbul. No one paid much attention to it when it drifted back into the American press.

ON MAY 5 Khrushchev dropped his bomb, or part of it: an American plane, down on Russian soil. The National Security Council decided to stay with the cover story. Although the NSC had also decided that the State Department was to do the talking, the story with all its new, embellished, soon-to-be-exposed untruths was given out by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, without clearance, from State, CIA or White House. Who gets the blame for this remains a question.

Then Khrushchev dropped the rest of his bomb — Powers' survival — and the blunders multiplied. The cover story was renewed, then abandoned. Mr. Eisenhower was officially said not to have authorized the flight, but then he personally assumed responsibility. A statement by Mr. Herter implied (or did it?) that the flights would continue.

It was a fearful lesson in overconfidence, executive indecision, faulty timing — fearful but, as this account of it promises to be, endearingly valuable.